

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 PM-05 INR-10 SS-15 NSCE-00

SSO-00 INRE-00 /053 W

-----001207 231804Z /43

P R 231621Z FEB 78

FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0629

INFO SECDEF WASHDC

USDAO KINSHASA

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIBREVILLE 0481

SECDEF FOR DIA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAIR, GB

SUBJ: DOWNED HELICOPTER

REF: (A) LIBREVILLE 462 (NOTAL)

1. AFTER THREE DAYS OF UNSUCCESSFUL SEARCHING FOR THE HELICOPTER THAT WENT DOWN WITH AT LEAST THREE MEMBERS OF PRESIDENT BONGO'S FAMILY, THE MOOD IN LIBREVILLE IS SOMBER. IN HIS GROWING ANGUISH BONGO HIMSELF IS GETTING EDGY AND CONSEQUENTLY SO IS MOST EVERYONE ELSE. BONGO EXPLODED PUBLICLY AT THE FRENCH BLAMING THEIR PUMA HELICOPTER AND THEIR THREE MAN CREW OPERATING IT. HE INSTRUCTED THE COMMANDER OF THE GABONESE AIR FORCE TO FIND SOMETHING TO REPLACE THE FRENCH MAKES. BONGO WAS UNHAPPY THAT OUR DATT AIRCRAFT DID NOT ARRIVE FEBRUARY 22 AND MADE CERTAIN SOME LET US KNOW IT. THESE ARE TEMPORARY ABERRATIONS AND MOST CERTAINLY WILL BLOW OVER. BONGO HAS THE REPUTATION FOR SHOOTING FROM THE HIP BUT HE ALSO HAS THE SENSE TO BACK OFF ILL-CONCEIVED STATEMENTS.

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2. USDAO KINSHASA TEAM WAS WARMLY WELCOMED BY GABONESE MILITARY WHEN IT ARRIVED THIS MORNING, HAS COMPLETED SEARCH ONE ZONE AND WILL BEGIN AGAIN 0800 TOMORROW.

FRENCH SENT TWO AIRCRAFT FROM FRANCE AND ONE FROM DAKAR AND HAVE BEEN SEARCHING PRIMARY AND SECONDARY ZONES FOR

TWO DAYS. NOT MANY PEOPLE IN THE COMMAND CENTER HAVE MUCH HOPE IN FINDING A CAMOUFLAGE-PAINTED HELICOPTER IN UNPOPULATED RAIN FOREST WHERE THE PRIMARY CANOPY IS FORMED BY TREES 150 FEET OR MORE TALL AND SECONDARY CANOPIES BY SHORTER TREES BELOW.

3. ALTHOUGH PREPARATIONS CONTINUE FOR WHAT WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE BEEN THE MOST GRANDEST 12 MARCH RENOVATION DAY CELEBRATION EVER, PEOPLE ARE BEGINNING TO WONDER WHETHER IT WILL BE CANCELLED. WE DOUBT IT.

4. WE HAVE LEARNED THAT PRESIDENT'S SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR DEFENSE AFFAIRS, JULIAN MPHOUHOU, WAS NOT RPT NOT ONE OF THE TWO BONGO NEPHEWS ABOARD THE HELICOPTER. YATES

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: HELICOPTERS, AIRCRAFT ACCIDENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 23 feb 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978LIBREV00481
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780084-0488
Format: TEL
From: LIBREVILLE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780223/aaaaatep.tel
Line Count: 76
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 78629ed1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 LIBREVILLE 462
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3508211
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: DOWNED HELICOPTER
TAGS: EAIR, GB
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/78629ed1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014